

# Don't Get Caught Unprepared: Severe Weather and Emergency Planning

The winter storm that hit north and central Georgia the last week in January is a good reminder that, regardless of forecasts, weather can change from bad to worse very quickly, stranding people from home and work. It is the right thing to do to take personal responsibility and plan ahead for these events. As employers we really need to think about the impact and consequences of travel for our employees. This includes employee safety and their legitimate concern for their family's safety. It is worth taking some time before winter is over – and before spring hazardous weather hits – to review both our workplace emergency plans and our individual and family emergency plans. The following is a summary for preparedness from the ready.gov site. Please visit the site for more details.

## Preparing for Severe Weather

Build an Emergency Supply Kit, which includes items like non-perishable food, water, a battery-powered or hand-crank radio, extra flashlights and batteries. You may want to prepare a portable kit and keep it in your car in case you are told to evacuate. This kit should also include a pair of goggles and disposable breathing masks for each member of the family.

Make a Family Emergency Plan. Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so it is important to know how you will contact one another, how you will get back together and what you will do in case of an emergency.

Continually monitor the media. Be aware of storm's which could impact your area.

Know how you will be warned in an emergency (NOAA Weather radios with a tone alert are a good option).

Know if you live or work in a flood prone area. Check with your local emergency management for details.

Know where to shelter (ie: basement, interior room/hall, bathroom, closet, etc) if conditions warrant and where shelters in your area are located.

Ensure your home is ready. Elevate items in the basement which could be flooded. Bring in outdoors items such as children's toys, patio furniture, garbage cans, etc which could be blown around and damaged. Remove dead or rotting trees and branches that could fall and cause injury or damage.

Know how to shut off utilities, including power, water and gas, to your home. Have proper tools (i.e.: wrench) ready and nearby.

Find out what types of events and kinds of damages are covered by your insurance policy. Keep insurance policies, important documents and other valuables in a safe and secure location.

Keep fire extinguishers on hand and make sure everyone knows how to use them.

## During Severe Weather

Keep an eye on the sky. Look for darkening skies, flashes of light or increasing wind. Listen for the sound of thunder. If you can hear thunder, you are close enough to be struck by lightning.

Blowing debris or the sound of an approaching tornado may alert you. Tornado danger signs included dark, almost greenish sky; large hail; a large, dark, low-lying cloud or a loud roar, similar to a freight train.

Heed shelter or evacuation requests made by officials or announcements on radio/television.

Gather family members, bring pets indoors and have your emergency supply kit ready.



Close outside doors and window blinds, shades or curtains. Stay away from doors, windows and exterior walls. Stay in the shelter location until the danger has passed.

During lightning, do not use wired telephones, touch electrical appliances or use running water. Cordless or cellular telephones are safe to use.

Remember the 30/30 Lightning Safety Rule: Go indoors if, after seeing lightning, you cannot count to 30 before hearing thunder. Stay indoors for 30 minutes after hearing the last clap of thunder.

If it has been raining hard for several hours, or steadily raining for several days, be alert to the possibility of a flood.

Do not walk through flowing water. Drowning is the number one cause of flood deaths. Six inches of swiftly moving water can knock you off your feet.

Stay indoors and limit travel to only absolutely necessary trips. Listen to radio/television for updates.

## After Severe Weather

Stay off roads to allow emergency crews to clear roads and provide emergency assistance.

Help injured or trapped persons. Do not attempt to move seriously injured persons unless they are in immediate danger of death or further injury.

Use the telephone only for emergencies.

Use care around downed power lines. Assume a downed wire is a live wire. Report to emergency authorities.

Watch out for overhead hazards such as broken tree limbs, wires and other debris. Be cautious walking around.

Be aware of children playing outdoors and in the streets, particularly climbing on or running around downed trees and wires. Parents should remind their children to stay away from these hazards.

Avoid walking into flood waters. The water may be contaminated by oil, gasoline or raw sewerage, contain downed power lines or animals.

Look for hazards such as broken/leaking gas lines, damaged sewage systems, flooded electrical circuits, submerged appliances and structural damage. Leave the area if you smell gas or chemical fumes.

Clean everything that gets wet. For food, medicines and cosmetics; when in doubt, throw it out.

Make sure backup generators are well ventilated. Never use grills, generators or camping stoves indoors.

Listen to media reports and/or local authorities about whether your community water supply is safe to drink and other instructions.

Make sure gutters and drains are clear for future rain/flood events.

Take photographs/videos of damage as soon as possible. Contact your insurance company to file a claim.